

## Freeway decision put off until 2011

by [Cathryn Creno](#) - Mar. 9, 2009 12:00 AM  
*The Arizona Republic*

A decision on the size and alignment of the proposed South Mountain Freeway extension near Ahwatukee Foothills and the [Gila River Indian Community](#) likely will not be made until 2011, a spokesman for the [Arizona Department of Transportation](#) said.

ADOT Community Relations Director Timothy Tait attributed the delay to the Maricopa Association of Governments' recent decision to look at options that might create plans for a six-lane parkway instead of the proposed 10-lane freeway.

That in turn will likely delay his agency's completion of an environmental-impact study the federal government requires before signing off on the plan, Tait said.

The parkway has been proposed as freeway planners look for ways to balance a \$5.3 billion shortfall in Arizona's 20-year transportation plan.

The shortfall comes from falling sales-tax revenue in Proposition 400 combined with rising construction costs.

The original freeway plan has called for the

extension of Loop 202 to run along the Pecos Road alignment in [Ahwatukee Foothills](#).

The freeway would then cut through South Mountain and connect with the West Valley.

Recently appointed Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio, who represents Ahwatukee Foothills, has said he would like to see a decision made on a Loop 202 alignment by the end of the year.

Current plans call for knocking down homes and a church that are in the freeway path.

"People there are in limbo," DiCiccio said.

Also frustrated are members of a freeway-opposition group Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children.

"We have reached the point of ultra marathon," said PARC member Jim Jochim. "We've been beating this issue up for six years. It's now an endurance competition."

Tait said ADOT, which is conducting the environmental study for the [Federal Highway Administration](#), was about to finish a draft.

The section that remains to be completed is one that deals with Gila River Indian Community's "traditional cultural properties"

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at South Mountain, he said.

constructed."

Under federal law, the freeway would be constructed in a way that preserves traditional cultural sites, he said.

Alia Maisonet, public-information officer for the Gila River Indian Community, said Gila River is reviewing a draft of the environmental report but has yet to comment.

ADOT had planned to hold public hearings on the environmental document this summer, so a decision on the freeway alignment could have been made in 2010. But that will not happen, Tait said.

Instead, MAG will release the parkway proposal in the fall.

ADOT will then need to rework the environmental study based on the scaled-down plans.

Public hearings likely would take place in the second part of 2010, he said.

Tait said ADOT also was frustrated with the slow progress on the connection between the East and West valleys.

"It's the missing link in the whole system," he said. "We would hate to think about what traffic will look like in 15 years if nothing is

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